

The Iron Rule

Come with me and listen to a legend of *bitterness*. Come and I will tell you a tale of *legendary jealousy* between two brothers.*

Come to Edom, the land below the Dead Sea...south of the salty, brackish water where nothing can live.

...This is a tale of a family. This is the story of a nation...built upon the trickery of Jacob...and the stubborn envy of Esau, his older brother..whom Jacob robbed. From the beginning there was greed and maneuvering in this family.

Rebekah, the boys mother, loved her younger son, Jacob...more than the elder, Esau. And she conspired to give her favorite son that which was not his by birthright.

....The day came when Isaac, their father, old and doddering...with eyes too dim to see....called unto himself his first born son, Esau, that he might bless him with his heritage. He sent Esau from the tent of their meeting with the order to go into the dusty hills of their nomadic journeys and find wild game for them to eat. Isaac desired a last feast of fowl and beast, a savory banquet for his palate....that he might give his eldest son a blessing fitting for the family and its inheritance as the chosen family of God. But Rebekah overheard her husband's request and she got Jacob, her pet, the second born, to quickly fetch two kid goats from close at hand in the flock that she might prepare them the way Isaac liked them.

Jacob did as told*....and together...they tricked his father Isaac...into blessing him, the younger son, giving him the boon and favor of: the dew of heaven and fatness of the earth. It was Jacob now to whom nations would bow down, and people serve, and he would be...lord...over his brothers!

But scarcely had Jacob left the tent... Hardly had his feeble father's hands left the goat hide covering his neck and back before Esau came in from the hunt and asked for the blessing he rightfully expected. The door of the tent, the blanket of wool was still swinging from his little brother's hastened exit when the deserving, righteous, hard working older brother...came in to the dark heat of the desert tent and asked...for what his little brother...had already stolen.

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And Isaac trembled violently we're told, for he could not twice give the same blessing. And he asked his son, "Who was it then that..before you came, I have blessed? And the Bible says, "When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me even also, O my father!" But Jacob had taken it already away. He had supplanted himself...instead.

And the Bible says, "Esau now hated Jacob...because of the blessing." And he plotted to kill Jacob... But Rebekah warned her son and he escaped to his mother's country....there to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel.

For years I have wondered whatever happened to Esau. For decades I wondered the world wondering what happened to his older twin, cheated out of his fortune. I wondered through Bible studies and Bible reading. My subconscious stuck on that question and thought of Esau...and whether he ever regained even a bit of his inheritance. I worried over it...like an unfinished story that aches for an answer...but the author's left it undone.

Until some decades back. And finally, with enough Bible reading (I think I was on my first time through the Bible from Alpha to Omega), : I found the answer here. And todaywe see it. In this passage...we get...the rest..of the story. And for me, it's like the missing piece of the puzzle....is finally set in place.

And sure enough, Esau is still there. And he's still angry. He's still around all these years away and lands later. 'Still seething, still fuming...and plotting his revenge for what his brother did to him. He's nursing his anger by gloating over Jacob's turn of fate. He has stood in stubborn pride and rejoiced over Jacob's misfortune. He has looted Jacob's goods in the day of his now wealthy, younger brother's calamity. And, Obadiah says, he has "***stood aloof...and so done violence***"...[that's a Biblical quote, "stood aloof...and so – done - violence"] to his brother Jacob. (Sounds like a lot of families I know.... ☹)

He has been like the older brother to the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal's elder brother was the one that worked in the fields for his father. He was the good boy that set the good example: was righteous, did not ask for his inheritance, did not run off to a foreign land of loose morals and squander his wealth in fast living. None of this had he done....and now, after years of hard work while his little bro' was off wasting his family inheritance in riotous living and now come slinking home after eating with pigs....his father, their father...welcomed...the squirt!

And the question is, for the elder brother, ‘Should he go...to the banquet?’ Should he too forgive? Should he sit down and eat the fatted calf...and forgive and love and live again...with his prodigal brother? His wasteful, scoundrel of a brother...

And if he was Esau, the answer would be no. A stone hard, cold...angry...seething....’no’! Not now. Not ever!

And that’s why Obadiah wrote his book. That’s why...God...had to speak through this prophet, to those of us in history who would rather nurse wounds....and hold on to our anger...than forgive and forget...and love again. (Listen up, church!)

Obadiah’s vision...is God’s anger, God’s vehemence...against our...stubbornness! Listen, concerning Edom, Esau’s family, regarding those of us who would rather hold hard feelings and be estranged forever.

“For I will bring you down, to the ground, says the Lord!” (Maybe injustice was done. Jacob, the Trickster, did become Israel, who contends with the Lord. But) Esau, even though he is right, shall be pillaged and confederates shall prevail against him. Trusted friends shall set a trap for him, and all his wisdom shall not save him. All his hardened heart, all his smart revenge and seething, silent treatment...shall return upon him, on *his head*....like the knife that it is. Revenge....is God’s alone!

There are two lessons in this little prophecy. There are two kernels, and more, of God’s word in this, the shortest book in the Old Testament.

And the first one is that we all part...of God’s family. God’s judgment continues to cover all Creation’s children, not the favorite, chosen, not just the ones who look like...they’ve been blessed. And Esau, whether he be the aggrieved, older brother Jacob, who inherited Abraham’s seed, or whether be our brethren and sisters in the Christian church...all are part...of the Master’s flock. (Those of us who’ve been hurt; and those who’ve done...the hurting.) And we say we know that... But we don’t act like it.

We’d rather cut down charismatics, or be suspicious of Catholics. So that, whether it’s inside the church or outside, we *always think of ourselves* as the most deserving.

But Muslims, Buddhists, and humanists too...are created by God. They are still part of the family of Adamah*, Adam. Adam means...mankind..., everyone made from the Adamah, the earth. Even though we’d rather they not have part of our promised land.

And if we, like Esau, would separate ourselves and harden our hearts, adopting an iron rule, then God will yet break our pride. (Listen up, O nation...if you would claim to be under God!)

And that is the other lesson. That is what God's other lesson points to and pounds home here through his servant, Obadiah. For you and I can wander off, hurt after some family argument...and carve out our own land of Edom...*...and live in it, full of bitterness and anger: aloof, stand-offish, ~ *or even polite* but not more than civil...and **God – will – break us!**...for such stubborn envy (even if we are right to start with). Stubborn self-righteousness...is deadly!

The Bible says, "The day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done it, shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head." And all we send into the lives of others...shall come back...into our own!

So, is there a way out? Is there a way to escape such self-determined destruction? For Communists and Capitalists? Remember the Cold War? For Muslims that hate so much they turn to terror against Christians? For Jews who kill Palestinians or Jordanians? For Sandanistas and Nicaraguans? For Afrikaners and colored? For Pentecostals and social gospelists? For brother in Beatrice and sisters in Seward? For families and parents and children, and friends and spouses...? Is there a way out?

Yes.

There is a way.

There is a place in Mount Zion, the Holy City, where **there shall be those who escape** this family hatred.

And there is a time, the Day of the Lord, when those who humble themselves and love God...shall climb out (of Edom). They shall go up to the enter the Holy City.....and ***that realm***...shall be the dominion of our God.

May we escape... May we all...escape Edom, the land of bitterness we create in our hearts. May we pilgrimage to the promised land to survive and thrive....in a land of grace, a place and way of holiness.

We all get to choose where we live. As for me and my house...we choose to live in the land of love. And grace. Amen.